



# News Release

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## **Wildfire smoke worsens; state health provides thousands of respirators**

*Local health officials in hardest hit areas ask state for respirator masks, get quick help*

**OLYMPIA** — State health officials have sent more than 20,000 respirator masks to local health agencies hit hardest by the smoky wildfires in central and eastern Washington. The Kittitas County Public Health Department is getting 10,000 respirators today, and Chelan-Douglas Health District got 12,000 midweek — both shipments were made at the request of local health authorities in anticipation of possible local shortages.

The N-95 respirators are part of the Strategic National Stockpile delivered to the state during the H1N1 (swine flu) outbreak. The respirators are available for people in those communities who are at risk of health effects from hazardous levels of wildfire smoke; residents should contact the health agency in their community for details on where to get them and how to use them. People with heart and lung disease should check with their health care professional because it's harder work to breathe through a respirator.

Smoke from wildfires has ranged into the “unhealthy” and “hazardous” categories in several areas, according to local health officials. [Chelan-Douglas Health District](#) is providing area residents daily updates of local conditions. Wildfire smoke has also hit [Kittitas](#), Whitman, Okanogan, and Yakima counties hard; local health officials there are the best source of health advice based on air quality conditions in those communities. Air quality varies widely in these areas, and local decisions are based on those specific conditions; for example, [Whitman County Public Health](#) has recommended canceling outdoor activities and events.

The Washington State Department of Health is providing support to the counties affected by wildfire — offering the respirators, working to provide indoor air monitors for public buildings such as schools, and providing technical assistance and informational material for local and state agency partners.

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Wildfire smoke can be [harmful to everyone and very serious for vulnerable people](#), especially infants and young children, pregnant women, adults over 65, and people with existing heart and lung conditions. Small particles in smoke can irritate the lungs, nose, throat, eyes, and sinuses. It's best to reduce exposure to wildfire smoke by staying indoors with windows and doors closed, use the "recirculate" setting on air conditioners with the outside air vent closed, and avoiding physical exertion in smoky conditions.

The [Department of Ecology](#) provides an interactive map showing air quality monitoring stations around Washington and there are several other online resources on the [Department of Health wildfire smoke website](#). [Find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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